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ABSTRACT

Beginning in 1966, the relationship between levels of formal education, specifically the attainment of an associate degree from a two-year college, and quality of employment among young adults reared in rural areas, was examined in a multi-phase, longitudinal sampling procedure which obtained data from a pool of high school sophomores from counties designated as rural and economically disadvantaged in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina and Texas. Samples from this pool were surveyed again in 1968, 1972, and 1979, resulting in data from 964 subjects who were 35.3% black and 45.5% female. Dimensions of job quality measured income earned, amount of supervisory responsibility, and autonomy over work speed, breaks, and hours. Job quality increased across levels of education from high school diploma, vocational/technical school degree, associate degree, and baccalaureate degree. Associate degree recipients achieved, to a lesser degree, most employment advantages associated with a college degree. The associate degree was an intermediate level of education that led to better employment situations in its own right. Whites, males, and migrants achieved higher scores on each job quality indicator than did nonwhites, females, and nonmigrants. It was concluded that junior colleges provide a necessary service to rural youth as an opportunity to upgrade quality of employment. (NEC)

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Quality of Achieved Employment Among Rural Youth Who Complete Junior College Associate Degree Programs

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INTRODUCTION

In striving to achieve the American ideal of a well-paying, high quality occupation, it is believed by many adults and youth alike that the avenue to such a successful situation is through formal education. Typically, the motivating force for pursueing the attainment of high levels of education is to increase the assurance of achieving a more satisfactory job in the employment marketplace (Glenn and Weaver, 1982). Rural youth particularly, who are upwardly mobile in their achievement orientation, place considerable value on education as an intervening condition leading to better quality jobs.

The occupational attainments of rural youth are hampered by the lack of varied occupational opportunities available in rural areas. Geographic migration to urban areas is often a prerequisite to employment success. As such however, rural areas are drained of their most ambitious and motivated young adults. Moreover, the migration process is initiated at completion of high school when those youth desiring a college education must up-root themselves from the local community. For many, this is a decision that once made is not reversible and these youth never return to the rural area.

Acknowledging the importance of making education more easily accessible

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and affordable to rural and small town youth by state governments has resulted in the creation of a widely distributed network of junior or community colleges throughout most Southern states. These institutions are designed to meet the needs of rural areas for locally available college level courses and two- year programs. Students completing such programs receive an Associate Degree (AD), at which point they may terminate their formal education or continue on to a four-year college.

Because of the increased education available to rural youth, one expectation is that more will remain within the rural area, thereby helping to upgrade the local labor force. Similarly, from the individual's perspective, locally available educational opportunities should allow for the improvement of work skills and lead to more satisfying and rewarding employment.

The purpose of this analysis is to answer several questions about the nature of the relationship between different levels of formal education and job or employment quality among young adults reared in rural areas. Questions raised include: Do rural youth achieving the AD experience a higher level of job quality when entering the employment marketplace? How does the job quality of those with the AD compare to that of persons with less or more formal education? How do such personal characteristics as race and sex relate to job quality attainment for AD graduates? And, how do nonmigrants with an AD fair in job quality relative to other nonmigrants and migrants?

Job Quality

The concept of job quality is the central focus of this analysis. By job quality we imply the varied dimensions of work that serve to make some employment situations more satisfying and desireable than others. Three such dimensions

involving five distinct indicators are identified. These include income earned, supervisory responsibility, and work autonomy which includes the sense of control one has over activities in the work situation such as the speed worked, timing of work breaks, and number of hours worked. Excluded from this set of dimensions is the factor of occupational status or prestige. Our arguement for doing so is that occupational status is not an aspect of the employment or work situation itself, but rather, is an abstraction based on a general assessment of the job quality attached to specific occupations. As such, this measure has little direct relevance to any specific employment situation in which a worker finds him or her self.

As a general hypothesis, we would expect a positive relationship to exist between education and job quality. That is, the higher the level of attained education the better (higher) are all indicators of job quality. "Better" is defined to mean more income, more workers supervised, and more job autonomy by having greater control over work speed, breaks, and hours.

Previous research has tended to focus primarily on the relationship between education and occupation using income and prestige as the key measures (Weiss and Williamson, 1972,1975; Welch, 1974; Wolff, 1977). Several recent studies have reaffirmed this positive correlation between education and income (Glenn and Weaver, 1982; Wanner and Lewis, 1982). Research pertaining to the other job quality dimensions of responsibility and autonomy or control are difficult to locate in the sociological literature. In fact, we were unable to identify a single published article that considerded these variables. Typically, sociologist have limited their investigations to job satisfaction rather than specific conditions experienced in the work place.

Growing Importance of Junior Colleges

According to recent statistics released by the National Center for Educational Statistics (1984), more than half of all high school seniors in 1980 continued their education. Initially, 31 percent went to a four-year college, 18 percent to a two-year college, and 5 percent to a vocational or technical school. Not all students begin their post-high school education the same year they graduate. By the beginning of 1982, an additional 4 percent had begun a four-year college program and 7 percent a two-year junior college program. In the South fewer high school seniors go on to a four-year college (31%) and proportionately more of those continuing their education went to two-year colleges (16%). Data are not available for determining the proportion of two-year students who will terminate their education with an AD versus continuing on to the baccalaureate degree. However, these statistics clearly indicate the importance of two-year colleges in the U.S. and Southern education.

The current era, is one in which many four-year colleges are finding it necessary to close their doors because of rapidly rising costs, a shrinking pool of potential students, and increased competition among colleges. At the same time, two-year colleges are increasing in number and in enrollment (Stupak, 1982). Associate Degrees (AD) obtainable from the more readily accessible junior or community colleges are enabling many Americans to upgrade their skills and to broaden their knowledge in order to find and maintain their employability (Eskow, 1983).

With this increased trend toward the AD, it is important to analyze the job quality returns attributable to a two-year education. The specific hypothesis tested is that young adults completing the AD attain better job quality than

those completing only high school or technical school. A correlary hypothesis is that young adults completing the AD attain poorer job quality than those completing college. It is our contention that AD graduates experience some, but not all, of the job quality benefits that accrue to those who complete college; and that their position is an intermediate one bridging the differences between the high school and the college graduate.

METHODS

Sample

A multi-phase sampling procedure was used in obtaining the data for this analysis. The initial phase focused on high schools in counties designated as rural and economically disadvantaged representing the states of Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Texas. These states represent [redacted] the deep South. Procedures for choosing the counties and number of high schools to be sampled were developed independently for each state. However, the resulting sample has been documented as demographically similar (Thomas, 1970; Lever, 1969; White, 1974; Howell, 1977). In the Spring of 1966, Sophomores at all selected high schools were administered questionnaires by either collective or individual interview. A second questionnaire was administered in a similar fashion to the same cohort of seniors attending the same high schools two years later in 1968.

The second phase of the sampling procedure was conducted in [redacted] Summer, 1972. A sample was drawn from the original pool of students who participated in both the 1966 and 1968 studies. To the extent possible each state selected a panel of 250 respondents from the larger pool of students. To insure the representiveness of the sample, the panel was stratified 50:50 by race and 60:40 by sex with the larger proportion for the males (Howell and Frese, 1981). The number of black participants in some states was less than the number necessary to realize the desired race ratio. This, along with unlocated cases and refusals, resulted in an actual sample of 1,228 panel members from an anticipated 1,500, or 82 percent of the desired panel size (Eggers and Dunkelberger, 1982).

During 1979, approximately 75 percent of the 1972 panel participants were

relocated and interviewed once again. Mail questionnaires were disbursed and supplemented by telephone interviews and finally personal interviews. A total of 964 completed questionnaires resulted from this effort. The completed 1979 panel was 35.3 percent black and 45.5 percent female showing slight losses in black and male representation.

Measurement Procedures

The focus of this investigation is the relationship between particular levels of educational attainment and job quality. Educational attainment is identified as the independent variable by which different dimensions of job quality vary. These job quality dimensions are differentiated further by the independent conditions of race, sex, and migration status. The remainder of this section is devoted to the description of the operational definitions used in measuring both the independent and dependent variables.

Independent Variables. Level of educational attainment. This variable was determined by asking respondents to indicate all types of educational programs completed. ~~The~~ Eleven categories of educational or special training programs were presented for the purpose of selection.[1] From the multiple responses provided by each panel member, the highest level of educational attainment was determined. The range of eleven attainments was reduced to six by combining adjacent and logically similar categories: (1) high school (2) vocational and technical (3) associate degree (4) baccalaureate degree (5) masters degree (6) PhD or professional degree.

Migration Status. This variable was determined by comparing each individual's original place of residence with his or her 1979 residence. Categories describing migration status included residing (1) in the same county (2) the adjacent county (3) other county in the state (4) adjacent state (5) another state in the south (6) outside the south. These categories were

reduced to a dichotomy differentiating only panel members who were living in the same county from those who had moved beyond the county of residence in 1966.

Race and Sex. The classification of whites and nonwhites consisting primarily of blacks was used. Those few Indians and other nonwhite panel participants are included as nonwhites. Both the race and sex variables were based on the self reports provided on the 1966 questionnaire.

Dependent Variables. Five variables are used to measure the concept of job quality. These include average monthly income, ~~degree~~ amount of supervisory responsibility, and the degree of work autonomy. Work autonomy was operationalized as responses to three specific work conditions: (1) having a say in work speed, (2) having a say in the timing of work breaks, (3) having a say in work hours. The range of responses for each of these variables was (1) seldom, (2) some of the time, and (3) most of the time.

Average monthly income was determined by asking respondents to indicate the approximate amount of their take home pay per month. Responses ranged from $87.00 to $7801.00 per month.

Degree of supervisory responsibility was operationalized as the number of workers supervised. The range of responses was from none to 300 workers.

Statistical Analysis

Analysis of the data was conducted using multiple regression and one-way analysis of variance procedures. Multiple regression was employed to determine the respective contributions of each level of education to each measure of job quality. The resulting regression equation indicates the ability of the variable--educational level--to predict overall degree of job quality. Standardized regression coefficients (Betas) are reported as well as the

R^2 and F-values. Variables are considered significant at the 0.01 level.

Individual Beta coefficients describe the relationships between each level of the independent variable and each aspect of job quality. The sign of the coefficient is determined by the order in coding ~~of~~ the independent variable. A positive coefficient indicates relationships in which respondents possessed characteristics assigned a higher code for that particular variable.

The independent conditions of race, sex, and migration status are used in this analysis as dichotomized control variables. This usage enables comparisons to be made across the two categories of each control variable.

A one-way analysis of variance was used to determine the particular types of education most likely to increase job quality. This statistical technique enables consideration of possible effects of each level of the independent variable on the designated dependent variables. Means are reported for each dependent variable ~~according to~~ according to educational level completed.

RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between levels of attained education and quality of employment. These levels of attained education along with selected descriptive characteristics of the sample population are reported in table 1. The majority of respondents had not completed a level of education higher than an associate degree. High school graduates make up the largest educational category in the sample with only a very few respondents completing masters, PhDs, or professional degrees.

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between level of educational attainment and job quality. The standardized coefficients reported illustrate that higher educational levels are associated with more highly valued job qualities as defined by the five job quality indicators. For the total sample, educational attainment was significantly associated with two autonomy indicators--say in work speed and workbreaks, amount of responsibility, and average monthly salary.

In each instance, the higher the attained level of education the more likely nonwhites are to receive more pay per month and to supervise more workers. Although education does not affect the degree of autonomy held by nonwhites to any extent, among whites and females the autonomy indicators were significantly influenced by education. However, the number of workers supervised did not seem to be affected in this case. Regression of education by migration status seems to indicate that migrants from the rural areas do not necessarily achieve better quality employment than do nonmigrants. Education improved migrants monthly salary as well as their degree of autonomy concerning work speed and increased the number of workers supervised. However, nonmigrants were also significantly affected by education associated with work speed, work hours, and monthly salary.

The F-values of the variable divisions of race, sex, and migration status involved in the regression of education were all significant at the 0.01 level as shown in table 2. The multiple regression analysis indicates that amount of education has a definite impact on the quality of achieved employment among rural youth in this sample. Since we have determined that the higher the educational level completed the better the job quality, we must now examine the possible impact of type of educational program completed.

Rewards to the Associate Degree

The second question raised in this paper is whether an associate degree from a junior college or community college leads to "better" quality employment for rural youth. Because of geographic location, family responsibilities, and/or the high cost of attending a college or university, the associate degree provides many rural youth with a real and attainable educational compromise. As such, does the associate degree, as the terminus of one's formal education translate into better quality job situations?

To provide an answer to this question one-way analysis of variance was used to determine whether significant quantitative differences existed on various job quality indicators for young, rural adults completing various types of educational programs as their highest attainment. Four types or levels of educational programs are compared: 1)high school diploma, 2)~~trade~~ vocational or technical school degree, 3)associate degree, and 4)baccalaureate degree. Persons with post college graduate or professional degrees were not included in this analysis. Comparason of the mean differences observed between adults with associate degrees and those with other types of degrees are discussed separately for the total sample and for each subsample of the three control variables--race, sex, and migration status, Table 3.

Young Adults

Mean values for each of the 5 job quality indicators studied show a patterned increase across the four levels of education from high school diploma to college degree. Moreover, the job quality rewards to young adults who completed only an associate degree were greater than those of both high school and technical school graduates but less than those of college graduates. Generally, the differences between associate degree graduates and young adults with other levels of education were not ~~significantly~~ statistically significant. Three exceptions involved the fact those with associate degrees were more likely to perceive themselves having more say in the speed with which they work and in

the timing of work breaks than did high school graduates. On the other hand, college graduates earned significantly more income monthly ($217.00) than did associate degree graduates.

In ~~comparative~~ data reported in table 4, college graduates compared with ~~and~~ graduates from either high schools or technical schools revealed statistically significant differences in job quality. College graduates supervised significantly more workers, had higher monthly incomes, and perceived themselves as having more say in the speed they ~~worked~~ worked and the timing of their work breaks. The only measure that failed to differentiate college graduates from graduates of other levels was having a say in the hours worked per month.

These data indicate that the junior college associate degree has a marketplace value for rural young people. The fact that few job quality differences exist between associate degree graduates and those with high school diplomas, technical school degrees, or college degrees, clearly reveals the greater rewards realized. The associate degree recipient does achieve to a lesser degree, most of the employment advantages associated with a college education and narrows the gap between those with less education and those with college ~~graduates~~ degrees. It is an intermediate level of education that leads to better employment situations in its own right.

Subgroup Analysis

Under what, if any, circumstances does the above relationships hold? Is the pattern the same for both whites and blacks ~~youth~~, for males and females, and for nonmigrants and migrants? Each of these questions is taken up in the following discussion. Our focus will be on income since it was the most sensitive job quality indicator

Race. When the race of these young adults was held constant, the significant income difference between those with associate degrees and college graduates disappeared for both nonwhites and whites. However, the direction of the

difference was consistent with associate degree graduates earning more than either high school or technical school graduates but less than college graduates. The differential was larger among whites than nonwhites with college degrees ($212.00 versus $175.00 per month). Compared to young adults completing less education, nonwhite associate degree graduates had a larger pay differential than white associte degree graduates versus high school graduates and a smaller differential versus technical school graduates.

Nonwhite associate degree graduates were differentiated from other education levels on two measures of job autonomy. They were significantly more likely to perceive themselves as having a say over the speed they worked versus high school graduates. Similarly, nonwhite associate degree graduates perceived themselves as having significantly less say over the hours they worked than did college graduates.

White associate degree graduates were not differentiated from graduates at any other educational levels. The pattern of differences was consistent across all job quality indicators. Job rewards occuring to the associate degree graduate are generally similar for nonwhites and whites. The one exception is in the area of supervisory responsibility where, although not statistically significant, white associate degree graduates had a much larger average number of workers supervised and a much smaller average number than nonwhite college graduates.

Sex. When the sex of these young adults was held constant, the significant income difference observed for this sample of young adults was significant only for male associate degree graduates. Males with associate degrees earned more than those with less education, but significantly less per month than college graduates. This difference was $259.00 per month. No other job quality indicators reflected any major differences among males and except for the perception of having a say in the hours worked, male asssociate degree graduates had higher

mean scores than those with less education and lower mean scores than those with college degrees.

Females were not differentiated significantly on monthly income. Among women, associate degree graduates earned only $15.00 more per month that technical school graduates, but only $153.00 less per month than college graduates. To some degree this lack of difference may be attributable to the fact that more of the associate degree and college graduates might have been employed parttime compared to women with less education.

The only significant differential among women was in regards to the perception of having a say in the speed they worked. Female associate degree graduates and college graduates both perceived having more control than did high school graduates. Other differences for women were small. Particular reference can be made to the lack of reward to female associate degree graduates in the area of supervisory responsibility. They supervise just slightly more workers on the average than do women with less education. However, college women do not supervise a significantly larger number of workers than do women at all lower levels of education and the differential from lowest to highest is only an average of 3 workers.

Males faired better than females on all job quality indicators. Monthly income differences for young adults with associate degrees were $1,060.00 for males compared to only $617.00 for females. Differential rewards by sex are marked.

Migration. It was hypothesized that young adults who leave the rural area for greener pastures with more varied employment opportunities than those who remain in the same locality. Controlling for migration reveals only two statistically significant differences in job quality associated with associate degree graduates. Again the general pattern of positive marketplace rewards are achieved by associate graduates regardless of their migration decision, however

migrants tend to have slightly higher mean scores than do nonmigrants (data not shown) across all indicators. For example, migranting associate degree graduates report a mean monthly salary of $988.00 compared to $848.00 for nonmigrants.

Among nonmigrants, associate degree graduates earned somewhat more than those with less education, but not a significant amount; whereas migrant college graduates earned a significant $256.00 more than associate degree graduates. No other differences were found. Generally, migrant associate degree graduates experienced job quality rewards more similar to those of college graduates than to the job quality rewards of those with less education.

Monthly income differences among migrants were not statistically significant. Associate degree graduates received between $150.00 and $200.00 more per month than did high school and technical school graduates, and $158.00 less than college graduates. The one significant difference was with respect to the perception of having a say in work speed. Associate degree graduates and college graduates both perceived more control in this area of their employment than did high school graduates.

CONCLUSIONS

The relationships tested in this analysis between educational attainment and quality of employment revealed several interesting facts about junior college associate degree graduates in the workplace. It was stated that associate degrees offer rural youth an educational opportunity that should increase or improve overall quality of employment over that achieved by those with less education. The results of this study indicate that this hypothesis is true. Associate degrees provide necessary education which leads to rewards across a variety of job quality indicators.

Quality of employment was operationalized by five observable conditions. A sixth measurable phenomenon, occupational prestige, was considered but was omitted because the major concern of this study was to identify rewards within a job. It was felt that occupational status or prestige as measured by a socioeconomic index score did not fulfill the requirements associated with quality of employment. The other employment quality indicators; autonomy, responsibility, and income illustrate the rewards obtainable within specific job situations. Job quality is a concept that includes many dimensions of the workplace and is also an important aspect of overall quality of life.

One of the hypothesized relationships tested in this analysis involved associate degree graduates versus college graduates concerning job quality. The hypothesis was that the quality of employment for those receiving an associate degree is less than for those who complete a four-year university degree. This hypothesis could not be rejected. College graduates do tend to have a better quality of employment but not significantly better than those receiving associate degrees. A second hypothesis tested was that the quality of employment for those receiving an associate degree is better than for those receiving a high school diploma or a vocational-technical degree. Again, this hypothesis could not be rejected, since associate degree graduates do not achieve significantly higher job quality than those with less education. Because of this failure to find distinct statistical difference, it would appear that the associate degree is actually an intermediate level of education with its own level of rewards. In other words, associate degrees are a half-way point between high school and college as far as quality of employment is concerned. Thus, junior colleges do provied a necessary service to rural youth as well as

others in providing an opportunity to upgrade quality of employment beyond that achieved by persons lacking this education.

Additional analysis considered the factors of race, sex, and migration as they are associated with differential payoffs to education in the workplace. Clear job quality differences appear between males and females, whites and nonwhites, and migrants and nonmigrants with respect to the degree or level of job quality rewards achieved. In each case males, whites, and migrants achieve higher scores on each job quality indicator than do females, nonwhites, and nonmigrants. However, within each subgroup the intermediate reward position achieved by those who completed the associate degree to terminate their formal education was consistently maintained. Ther was a consistent payoff to attaining the associate degree that prevailed across virtually all indicators of job quality.

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TABLE 1. Selected descriptive characteristics of respondents by educational level completed (percent)

Characteristics	High School	Vocational Technical	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	PhD or Professional Degree
Female	38.2	27.9	9.6	14.9	8.7	0.7
White	31.7	20.4	13.9	23.3	8.6	2.3
Married	35.4	23.7	13.7	19.0	6.3	2.0
1979 Migration STATUS Residing in the same county as in 1966	41.8	25.8	14.1	12.9	4.4	1.0
Number	333	234	123	185	67	17

TABLE 2. Regression of Education Level by Total Sample, Race, Sex and Migration Status on Job Quality Indicators (Standardized Coefficients)

Job Quality Indicators	Total Sample	Race		Sex		Migration Status	
		Nonwhites	Whites	Males	Females	Migrants	Nonmigrants
Autonomy Indicators:							
Work Speed	.15*	.13	.17*	.05	.27*	.23*	.13*
Work Breaks	.09*	.09	-.01	.14*	-.04	.05	-.01
Work Hours	-.07	-.07	-.09*	.03	-.19*	.04	-.16*
Monthly Salary	.19*	.24*	.23*	.20*	.36*	.16*	.31*
Workers Supervised	.09*	.12*	.06	.09*	.05	.10*	.03
R^2	.106	.144	.088	.109	.128	.127	.133
F - Value	15.50*	7.83*	9.50*	10 01*	19.44*	11.03*	8.73*

* $p < .01$

Table 3. Mean Differences between job antonomy indicators, monthly income, and workers supervised for young, rural-reared adults with Associate Degrees compared to those with other attained levels of education for the total sample and of race, sex, and migration subsamples.

	Job Autonomy*			Monthly Income ($)	Workers Supervised
	Speed	Breaks	Hours		
Young Adults:					
High school graduates	-0.3**	-0.3**	0.0	-139	-3.2
Vo. tech graduates	-0.2	-0.1	0.0	-128	-1.9
College graduates	0.0	0.1	0.2	217**	4.4
Nonwhites:					
High school graduates	-0.5**	-0.3	0.3	-161	-1.0
Vo. tech graduates	-0.3	-0.2	0.2	- 76	2.3
College graduates	0.0	0.3	0.5**	175	2.0
Whites:					
High school graduates	-0.2	-0.3	0.0	-104	-3.8
Vo. tech graduates	-0.1	0.0	-0.1	-131	-3.9
College graduates	0.1	0.1	0.0	212	4.5
Males:					
High school graduates	-0.2	-0.2	0.1	- 66	-3.9
Vo. tech graduates	-0.2	-0.2	0.0	- 91	-1.2
College graduates	0.1	0.2	0.2	259**	5.5

Table 3. (Continued)

	Job Autonomy*			Monthly Income ($)	Workers Supervised
	Speed	Breaks	Hours		
Females:					
High school graduates	-0.4**	-0.3	0.0	-122	-0.6
Vo. tech graduates	-0.2	0.0	0.0	- 15	-0.4
College graduates	0.1	0.0	0.0	153	2.4
Nonmigrants:					
High school graduates	-0.2	-0.3	0.1	-122	-2.8
Vo. tech graduates	-0.2	-0.1	-0.1	- 70	-2.2
College graduates	0.1	-0.1	0.2	256**	0.9
Migrants:					
High school graduates	-0.4**	-0.3	0.0	-157	-3.6
Vo. tech graduates	-0.2	-0.1	0.1	-197	-1.9
College graduates	0.0	0.2	0.2	158	6.1

* Job autonomy scores ranged from 1 to 3.
**Significant at the .05 level.

TABLE 4. Mean differences between job autonomy indicators, monthly income, and workers supervised for young, rural-reared adults with four year college degrees compared to those with other attained levels of education.

	Job Autonomy*			Monthly Income ($)	Workers Supervised
	Speed	Breaks	Hours		
Young Adults:					
High School Graduates	-0.3**	-0.4**	-0.2	-356**	-7.6**
Vo. - Tech. Graduates	-0.2**	-0.2**	-0.2	-345**	-6.3**
Associate Degree Graduates	0.0	-0.1	-0.2	-217**	-4.4

* Job Autonomy scores ranged from 1 to 3.
**Significant at the .05 level.